

College Kids – Will The Apple Fall Far From The Tree?

Issue

When a son or daughter leaves home and heads off for college, do they remember everything their parents taught them about leading a healthy lifestyle? If not, are they hot on the trail of unlimited meals from mostly fast food restaurants, endless late night snacks of junk food, and marathons of trying to burn the candle at both ends at the same time? The answers to these and other similar questions were a source of concern to Dr. Marvin Wilson, Vice President of Student Affairs at Voorhees College, a small liberal arts college with approximately 750 students, located in Denmark, SC. Dr. Wilson, a former athlete himself, noticed that a growing number of the students, the majority of whom are native South Carolinians, were showing signs of steady weight gains.

In South Carolina, heart disease is the leading cause of death; stroke is number three and diabetes number six. South Carolina also ranks 7th in the nation in obesity rates. Armed with this information, Dr. Wilson pulled together a team to see what could be done to inspire the students of Voorhees to adopt healthier lifestyles. He contacted Barbara Grice, Director of Health Education, of the S.C. Department of Health and Environment Control (DHEC) Region 5, about his concerns and the school's needs.

Intervention

A brainstorming session and several work sessions were held with the DHEC Region 5 health education staff, and a series of activities were planned for the school year. These included a series of chronic disease workshops, a heart walk, and a Health and Wellness Day. The activities were publicized and made available to students and staff, as well as the surrounding community.

- The Heart Walk was a challenge between the various athletes and the general student body. Despite near freezing cold weather, students, faculty and staff and members of the Denmark community participated in the walk;
- For the Health and Wellness Day, students were able to talk with community partners about various chronic diseases. The majority of the students asked questions about what they could do to reduce their risk own factors, while discussing the chronic disease problems of various family members; showing that the event was more than an opportunity for them to get out of a class or two; and
- A chronic disease workshop series was offered to students, faculty and staff, giving the opportunity for more in-depth information to be shared.

Impact

The positive reception given these initial activities has opened the door to increased activities within this small college campus community. These activities will also provide another avenue for information reaching the general community. Successes include the following:

- The Heart Walk is now on the school's calendar as an annual event, and will be listed as a Greek/Athletic Department Challenge, to generate even greater interest among members of the student body;
- The Health and Wellness Day was attended by almost half of the student body and a number of faculty and staff. This activity is also slated to become an annual event; and
- The chronic disease workshop series has been made a part of Freshman Orientation activities, and will be required for all incoming freshman starting in the fall of 2008. Upperclassmen, faculty and staff will be able to attend the series as well.

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